

Race to the Top Program Review Guide

Program Review Overview

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) provided \$4.35 billion for the Race to the Top Fund, of which approximately \$4 billion was used to fund comprehensive statewide reform grants under the Race to the Top program¹. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) awarded Race to the Top (RTT) grants to eleven states and the District of Columbia.

As part of the Department's commitment to supporting States as they implement ambitious reform agendas, the Department established the Implementation and Support Unit (ISU) in the Office of the Deputy Secretary to administer, among others, the Race to the Top program. The goal of the ISU is to provide assistance to states as they implement unprecedented and comprehensive reforms to improve student outcomes. Consistent with this goal, the Department has developed a Race to the Top program review process that not only addresses the Department's responsibilities for fiscal and programmatic oversight, but is designed to identify areas in which Race to the Top grantees need assistance and support to meet their goals. Specifically, the ISU will work with Race to the Top grantees to differentiate support based on individual State needs, and help States work with each other and with experts to achieve and sustain educational reforms that improve student outcomes. The information and data gathered by the Department's program review will inform the Department's management and support of the Race to the Top states, as well as provide appropriate and timely updates to the public on their progress.

This guide summarizes the overall structure of the Race to the Top program review, as well as specific descriptions for each of the various program review components.

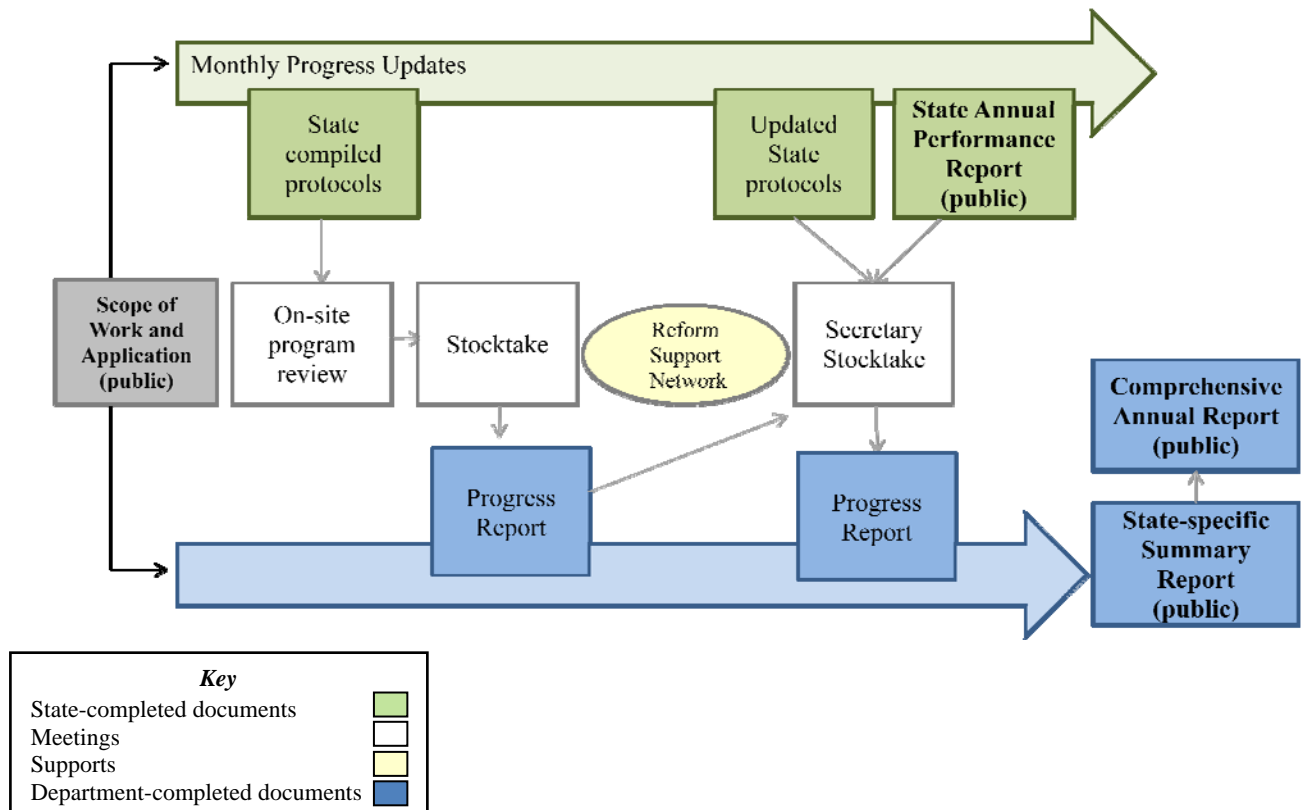
Program Review Components

The program review is a new process that emphasizes outcomes and the quality of program implementation by States rather than being solely a compliance-driven approach focused on inputs and discrete tasks. The review process includes ongoing conversations between the Department and grantees, on-site program reviews, grantee self-evaluations, and stocktake meetings with the Secretary of Education and ISU leadership. Grantees are asked to consider not only their progress on meeting timelines and managing their budgets but also their assessments of the quality of the implementation of their Race to the Top plans and their progress towards specific performance measures and goals. In addition, the ISU will work closely with the *Reform Support Network*² to ensure that the technical assistance provided to the Race to the Top states focuses on advancing States' reform efforts.

The following flowchart and narrative provide an overview of the annual components of the Department's program review of Race to the Top grantees. The review process will occur over the span of one year; an example of an annual process for the grant years two through four is provided below. The Department will work with grantees to schedule the various components of the program review, to the extent possible, at mutually-agreeable times. (Please note that the year one program review process will be slightly different.)

¹ The remaining funds were awarded under the Race to the Top Assessment program. More information about the Race to the Top Assessment program is available at www.ed.gov/programs/racetothe-top-assessment

² The *Reform Support Network* is explained in further detail on page 4.



Program Review

The program review is comprised of two protocols, Progress Updates and Accountability and Oversight. These protocols outline the essential information the Department will require for its review of Race to the Top grantees. The protocols are tied directly to the Race to the Top selection criteria and absolute priorities previously established and published in the Federal Register (<http://edicsweb.ed.gov>, 'Race to the Top Program Review Protocols' 04513 1894-NEW-v.1). Each protocol is described below.

Progress Update Protocol

In the Progress Updates, a State provides detailed information regarding the implementation of its approved application and scope of work. A State submits a monthly progress update to its program officer³ that includes two components: (1) a general update on the status of the implementation of its Race to the Top plan (Progress Update – Part A) and (2) progress updates for two application sub-criteria (Progress Update – Part B). These updates include a description of the activities implemented to date, a review of the quality of implementation, an assessment of the progress made on performance measures, and the challenges in implementing each relevant sub-criteria. Based on the activities outlined in the State's scope of work and application, the State works with its program officer to select two different application sub-criteria [e.g., building state capacity to sustain reform ((A)(2)) and improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance, ((D)(4))] to discuss each month. In addition to providing the Department with ongoing information on a State's progress against its performance measures and goals, the monthly submission of progress updates on two application sub-criteria reduces the burden on the State when compiling and updating the Program Review protocols for the onsite review and stocktake

³ Each State works with a program officer in the Implementation and Support Unit as its primary contact at the Department.

meetings. During the monthly calls, the Department also tracks State's progress against the timelines, benchmarks, and outcomes in the State's scope of work.

In preparation for the on-site program review, a State updates (where applicable) information provided previously on specific subcriterion and submits supporting documentation for all sub-criteria. In addition, the State provides an evaluation of the likelihood of reaching its performance measures and goals based on its implementation to date for each application criterion (e.g., Assurance Area B: Standards and Assessments) (Progress Update – Part C).

Accountability and Oversight Protocol

States must demonstrate compliance with accountability and oversight requirements, including fiscal, reporting, and sub-recipient monitoring requirements. Through the Accountability and Oversight Protocol, States provide the necessary information to demonstrate compliance with all Federal requirements. The Department will collect this information annually.

On-site Program Review

The Department conducts an annual on-site program review of each grantee. The purpose of this 3-5 day visit is to assess a State's progress in implementing its Race to the Top plan and achieving the goals described in that plan. During the on-site review, the Department uses the grantee's responses to the Progress Update, supporting documentation, and evaluation of the quality of implementation to analyze and assess progress against performance measures and identify areas where the Department can provide support and technical assistance. The Department uses the information provided in the Accountability and Oversight protocol and any supporting documentation to determine whether the State is in compliance with all applicable Federal fiscal, reporting, and sub-recipient monitoring requirements.

The Department's primary objective during the on-site visit is to examine the State's implementation of its Race to the Top reform plan and its oversight and support of participating local educational agencies (LEAs). To gain a better understanding of how the State is implementing its Race to the Top plan, in addition to consulting with State leadership and teams, the Department speaks with representatives of at least three participating LEAs to assess the impact of the State's Race to the Top reforms on instruction and student outcomes in schools and classrooms and discuss the State's management of the quality and progress of local implementation. These LEA interviews provide another perspective of the State's progress and help identify areas where the *Reform Support Network* might provide technical assistance to the State to support the effective implementation of its reform plans. The Department also meets with teachers and principals from schools within an LEA to discuss program implementation by the LEA and the effect of these reforms on classrooms and educators. (Teachers and principals participating in these discussions do not need to submit any information or documentation in preparation for the discussion.)

Stocktake Meetings

The stocktake meetings are periodic data-based conversations between the Race to the Top State and Department teams to discuss program implementation and identify successes and challenges. The discussions are informed by the State's scope of work, monthly progress updates, on-site program review, and other relevant qualitative and quantitative data, as available. The meetings provide an opportunity for the State to develop concrete plans for addressing areas of concern and identifying ways the Department can assist the State in addressing these concerns.

Generally, there are two stocktake meetings per year. The first stocktake meeting occurs after the on-site program review and includes the State's Race to the Top team, ISU leadership and staff, and members of the *Reform Support Network*. The second stocktake meeting occurs at the end of the grant year and includes senior Department leadership, potentially including the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Education. In preparation for these "Secretary stocktake" meetings, the State provides an update on the progress and the quality of implementation for relevant application sub-criteria.

Progress Report

The Department drafts a Progress Report that summarizes a State's outcomes to date; progress in meeting its benchmarks and timelines; features and characteristics of implementation to date; and next steps for the State and the Department. The Progress Report for each State is a dynamic document that is continuously revised based on new information, including updates from monthly Progress Updates, the on-site program review, stocktake meetings, and other relevant qualitative and quantitative data. The Department collaborates with the State to revise the Progress Report.

State Annual Performance Report (APR)

Each grantee submits an Annual Performance Report (APR) on outcomes to date, its performance against the measures established in its application, and other relevant data. The Department uses the APR to update grantee's Progress Report, and draft State-specific Summary Reports and the Comprehensive Annual Report. In addition, the Department uses data included in the APRs to provide Congress and the public with detailed information regarding each State's progress on meeting the goals outlined in its application. The final State APRs are posted on the Department's website.

State-specific Summary Report

The State-specific Summary Report is an annual comprehensive assessment of a State's Race to the Top implementation at a given point in time. The report highlights successes and accomplishments, identifies challenges, and provides lessons learned from implementation. The Department drafts this report incorporating information available from Program Reviews, Progress Reports, stocktake meetings, and State APRs. The Department provides the State with a draft for review and response. Once finalized, the Department posts the final State-specific Summary Reports on its website.

Comprehensive Race to the Top Annual Report

The Comprehensive Race to the Top Annual Report is an overview of Race to the Top reform efforts across all grantees. This report will be used to inform Congress and other stakeholders about the progress of the Race to the Top grantees, summarize trends and statistics across all 12 grantee States, highlight successes and accomplishments, identify common challenges, and provide lessons learned from implementation. This report will incorporate information provided from a variety of sources. The Department will post the final Comprehensive Race to the Top Annual Report on its website.

Reform Support Network

The *Reform Support Network*, a \$43 million 4-year technical assistance contract funded through ARRA, will help States build the capacity to implement and sustain education reforms to improve student outcomes. Technical assistance will be provided to grantees through among other activities, communities of practice, the development of common resources and tools, and individualized support. The *Reform Support Network* will also support all states, for example through national meetings and sharing grantees' work, findings, and lessons learned. Representatives from the *Reform Support Network* will participate in all stocktake meetings.

Transparency

The Department makes public the following documents on its website for each Race to the Top grantee:

- Approved Race to the Top Application
- State Scope of Work and all approved amendments
- Annual Performance Report (APR)
- State-specific Summary Report

In addition, the Department will post the Program Review Protocols, Program Review Guide, and Comprehensive Annual Report on its website.